

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Update on adolescent literacy

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 158.645, 158.6451, 158.6453, 164.0207, 704 KAR 3:304, 704 KAR 3:305, NCLB Reading First

History/Background:

Existing Policy. Literacy skills that prepare all students for success in the workplace and college are vital to Kentucky's future. According to the final report of the Kentucky Developmental Education Task Force report, *Securing Kentucky's Future*, Kentucky must reduce the number of under prepared students leaving high schools; otherwise, "...our per capita income will remain below the national average. The tax revenues needed to address public programs, including education, will stagnate...Individually, the students we fail to educate will be less healthy, live shorter lives, be three times more likely to be unemployed, and live on the economic margins of a 21st century information economy." Literacy success predicts earning potential and contributes to our economic development and competitiveness.

There are several existing statutes and regulations related to preparing students for literacy success. According to KRS 158.645, Capacities Required of Students, the first capacity relates to literacy; it addresses the communication skills necessary to function in a complex civilization. Additionally, in Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations, the first goal is related to literacy. It states, "All Kentucky schools shall develop their students' ability to use basic communication and mathematics skills for purposes and situations they will encounter throughout their lives." This includes:

- using reference tools;
- making sense of the variety of materials read;
- making sense of the various things they observe;
- making sense of the various messages to which they listen;
- writing using appropriate forms, conventions (e.g., grammar and usage, word choice, spelling), and styles to communicate ideas and information to different audiences for different purposes;
- speaking using appropriate forms, conventions, and styles to communicate ideas and information to different audiences for different purposes;
- using computers and other kinds of technology to collect, organize, and communicate information and ideas.

In 704 KAR 3:304, the Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools, P-12 is established, setting forth specific minimum content standards required for all students before

graduating from high school. These include literacy strands encompassing reading, writing (conventions such as grammar and usage, word choice, and spelling included as a part of writing), speaking, listening and observing, and additionally requires that literacy and critical thinking inquiry skills be embedded across all content areas.

Legislation has also created programs that address middle and high school literacy, such as the literacy coaches and mentors funded under 704 KAR 3:490 and the call for intervention strategies for accelerated learning for students whose scores on high school and college readiness examinations administered in grades 8, 10, and 11 indicate that additional assistance is required in English and reading (KRS 158.6459).

Purpose

Sensing the urgency in assuring that all students who exit the K-12 education system have the literacy skills needed to be successful in college or in the workplace, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) has chosen a focus on literacy at the adolescent level (grades 6-12) as a top priority. In their Strategic Work Priorities for 2007-2008, the KBE states that we will “ensure high levels of student achievement through an increasing focus on critical thinking skills across the curriculum; elementary, middle and high school mathematics; funding to systemically address adolescent literacy; and ensuring the delivery of targeted instructional interventions.”

The purpose of this Staff Note is to provide background information on Kentucky’s adolescent literacy efforts to date and to further prepare the Board as they begin to make decisions about Kentucky’s adolescent literacy agenda at the February 2008 meeting.

In the past, KDE has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at improving learning for all students. The current work in adolescent literacy builds on the lessons learned from those initiatives with the aim of designing a more cohesive, systematic, and sustainable framework. This framework to improve the literacy performance of Kentucky students includes The Conditions of Literacy Success. The basis for these conditions incorporates research on the state and national level and data from the Kentucky Core Content Test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as well as college readiness assessments, such as the ACT. As agreed upon by the Kentucky Literacy Partnership, the conditions that must be met in order for Kentucky to reach its objective of being a fully literate population include:

Conditions of Literacy Success

1. Supportive, participating families that value literacy.
2. Early diagnosis and evaluation with appropriate individual intervention for students who struggle with literacy at all levels.
3. Content area reading and writing instruction in all academic areas.
4. Acknowledgement and ownership by communities of the importance of reading and writing that leads to literacy attainment as a means to improve economic development and the quality of life.

5. Adequate time devoted to the teaching of reading and writing.
6. Engaging instruction in a supportive environment that will motivate students to achieve and to value education.
7. Well-prepared and supported teachers at all levels who have a deep understanding and knowledge of the latest research and processes needed to teach students to read and write in all content areas.
8. Leadership and policy direction at all levels that support reading and writing and lead to high literacy attainment for all Kentuckians.

The Kentucky Department of Education, with guidance from the Kentucky Board of Education, must now develop and implement an adolescent literacy agenda for the state that addresses each of these conditions in a manageable, systemic way. Numerous national organizations (e.g., National Governors' Association, National School Boards Association, Alliance for Excellent Education, Center on Instruction, International Reading Association, Southern Regional Education Board, National Association of Secondary School Principals) provide recommended guidelines for policy implementation regarding adolescent literacy. The commonalties across these guidelines are well summarized in the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) report, *From State Policy to Classroom Practice: Improving Literacy Instruction for All Students*. NASBE suggests that state policymakers and administrators "attend closely to what we know about:

- The importance of student engagement and motivation in literacy development;
- Integrating specific literacy strategies throughout all content areas to maximize learning;
- The interconnectedness of reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking;
- Using data to identify student needs and adjusting instruction accordingly;
- Implementing research-based literacy strategies for teaching and learning.

With attention to the research of these critical components of adolescent literacy development and the financial support from NASBE's planning grant (Attachment A), Kentucky is well positioned to implement policies and guidelines that will improve adolescent literacy throughout the Commonwealth.

During the February 2008 Kentucky Board of Education meeting, KDE staff will seek guidance from the KBE regarding the adolescent literacy agenda. Policies and practices that will be considered at that time include:

1. Early identification and diagnosis of struggling adolescent readers;
2. Implementation of systemic intervention programs;
3. Assessing and monitoring progress of adolescent readers;
4. Teacher preparation and professional development to incorporate literacy across content areas;
5. Implementation of state and local literacy plans.

The December 2007 presentation by the Kentucky Content Literacy Consortium (KCLC), Kentucky's Striving Readers program, will provide an opportunity for KBE members to understand how this federally funded research project has been implemented in 23 middle

and high schools throughout Kentucky (Attachments B, C). KBE members will learn how KCLC continues to address policies and practices similar to those that will later be considered at the state level. In addition, the December 2007 presentation will enable KBE members to learn the lessons deemed most critical by representatives of the KCLC work.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Improved literacy instruction leads to deeper knowledge, the development of critical and creative thinking skills, and has application to all content areas. Reading and writing are not subjects; they are skills that should be applied in all areas of learning so that students may reach proficiency.

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